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Abyssinia wakes up.

C. F. Rey.

Abyssinia Wakes Up

Africa's Unconquered Hamitic Kingdom Yields to Modernism

C. F. REY

The world is knocking at the barred door of Africa's proud and aloof Hamitic empire. Italy wants railway concessions and a mission headed by the Duke of Abruzzi recently visited the Abyssinian capital. England wants dams to control irrigation in Egypt and the Sudan. The League of Nations calls upon its member, Abyssinia, to restrict slavery. The future of this unconquered kingdom is in the balance —as described here by Mr. Rey, a Commander of the Star of Ethiopia, author of "Unconquered Abyssinia," and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

TO UNDERSTAND the present outlook in Abyssinia, the last of the great empires of Africa, it is necessary to know something of her long and eventful history, the strange mentality of her people, and their governmental and social organizations. This is possible only as a result of a long residence in the country. True, one may obtain a superficial survey by a visit to Addis Abbaba, the capital, but to grasp fully the nature of the problems confronting the rulers of this African kingdom to-day, and the difficulty of solving them, one must travel about the country and know something of its intricate language.

The history of Abyssinia is an ancient story of fact, legend, and tradition, ranging over thousands of years. The Regent, H. I. H. Taffari Makonnen, had prepared for me a list of 312 sovereigns, extending back over 6,300 years, to B. C. 4530, or the 97th year of the creation of the world, according to Abyssinian computation. Included in this list were Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, from whose son, Menelik, the ruling house claim direct descent, which would give them a pedigree of the somewhat unusual length of 3,000 years.

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ABYSSINIA'S ABSOLUTE MONARCH

Ras Taffari (seated), dressed in the native costume of his rank. His family traces its lineage to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Despite her long history Abyssinia, shut off from the rest of the world by towering mountains and barren deserts—"the world forgetting, by the world forgot"—boasts a people who have maintained an inviolability almost Tibetan in character. As a result, the mentality of her people and the condition of most of the country have remained virtually unchanged during the passage of centuries. They exist

much as they did two thousand years ago, all except the wealthier Abyssinians, living in *tukuls*, stone- or mud-walled huts thatched with grass.

True, Addis Abbaba, the capital, is now connected with the outside world by a railroad—a single line which runs between it and Jibuti, the port of French Somaliland. This is the only means of communication in a country nearly half again as large as Texas. The trains run only by day, out of respect to the proclivities of the Danakil tribes,

THE PRINCE REGENT, RAS TAFFARI, AND HIS FAMILY

King Menelik died in 1913, his unpopular grandson was deposed in 1916, and though the nobles favored crowning Taffari, he insisted that Menelik's frail daughter Zauditu be proclaimed Empress, with himself as Prince Regent and heir.

Photographs by E. A. Salisbury © Ewing Galloway

ABYSSINIAN OFFICERS ON THE CAPITAL'S PARADE GROUNDS

Abyssinia is an independent country, and holds a standing army of nearly 100,000 men in readiness to defend herself. For centuries this proud nation has resisted conquest.

who commandeer the rails for spearheads and the copper telegraph wire for bangles. In the wet season, moreover, travelers often spend three or four days covering the five hundred miles between Jibuti and the capital, owing to the fact that the permanent way has been washed out by heavy rains.

Addis Abbaba, which means "New Flower," was founded by Menelik after his victory over the Italians in 1896. It is a great straggling town, containing thousands of huts and a few stone buildings, with a population of about sixty thousand. Here, de-

THE EMPRESS OF ABYSSINIA

H. I. M. Waizeru Zauditu is a small woman, and the feet shown below the royal robes of state are dummies. She is the daughter of the late Emperor Menelik, and ascended the throne in 1917. She is fifty years old.

THE RULER WELCOMED HOME FROM HIS EUROPEAN TRIP

The bodyguard of Ras Taffari, the Prince Regent of Abyssinia, composed of first class fighting men, is not lacking in picturesqueness of uniform.

spite the encroachment of modern civilization and twentieth-century methods, the ancient customs still flourish.

The Abyssinians have been nurtured on foreign and civil war for very many centuries, and although they have experienced vicissitudes of success and defeat through the ages, victory has hitherto always rested with them ultimately. In olden times their empire extended to both sides of the Red Sea, and on the African coast stretched at least from Suâkin to Cape Guardafui. Their fleets traded to India and Persia, and possibly farther, and their caravans carried and brought back merchandise for many hundred miles beyond the confines of their country.

A ROYAL MESSENGER

The special messenger of the Empress carries her dispatches in a netlike contraption held over his left shoulder.

They were Christians before we were, and the story of their conversion by two shipwrecked youths to the monophysite form of Christianity (a doctrine which they still profess) is romantic reading. Their aid was sought by a Roman Emperor 1,600 years ago, and his letter addressed to the "Christian Princes of Abyssinia" is an interesting commentary on the state of the old empire. They gave asylum to the persecuted relatives of Mohammed before the Hegira, and some five hundred years ago were allied with the Portuguese against the invading hordes of Turks, Arabs, and Somals who nearly subjugated their country.

In modern times they lost all their coastline, and were shut off from the world by foreign territory; their country was devastated by civil war, and overrun by an invasion of Galla tribes from the south. The empire was split up into separate kingdoms, and it so remained until the advent of that remarkable man Theodore, who reunited much of the distracted realm, whose madness destroyed what his genius created, and who fell before Lord Napier's army and a general revolt of his own subjects.

It was left for the Emperor Menelik II to reëstablish on a more solid basis the ancient Ethiopian Empire. He greatly extended its borders, defeated all rival kings, conquered vast tracts of Galla territory, and actually defeated in battle the army of a great European power. His grandson, Lij Yasu, who succeeded him, reintroduced chaos, disorder, and misrule, but before Menelik's work could be undone Lij Yasu was deposed and the present Empress Zauditu (Menelik's daughter) and the Regent, Ras Taffari (Menelik's great-nephew) were installed in power in 1917. Finally, in the last few years, we have the picture of Abyssinia admitted to the League of Nations, the Regent visiting the principal crowned heads and rulers of Europe and recently receiving the return visit of the Duke of Abruzzi in Addis Abbaba. Such are a few of the salient facts which it is necessary to bear in mind if one is to appreciate the present position of the country.

It is a vast territory, more than twice as large as California, consisting of two immense plateaux enjoying a delightful climate, separated from each other by the Great Rift Valley, and surrounded on the frontiers by low-lying hot desert lands. The population has been variously estimated at from 8 to 13 millions; it consists of a large number of different races—Abyssinians, Galla, Shankalla, Somali, Gurague, Danakil, and others—speaking 70 different tongues, of which the principal and official language is Amharic, a somewhat difficult one to learn, inasmuch as there are 251 characters in the alphabet.

The people are quite uneducated and

THE ROYAL PALACE AT ADDIS ABBABA
One of the few large buildings in a straggling capital.

A STREET SCENE IN ABYSSINIA'S CAPITAL
Automobiles are now appearing in this city of 60,000.

A CEREMONIAL DANCE OF THE NATIVES
In appearance a native dance resembles a Ku Klux Klan celebration. Those participating in the ceremony form a great circle about the leaders in the center, who carry banners of bright colors.

illiterate. The Abyssinians, who form less than a third of the population, still wear the old dress which seems to have been theirs since time immemorial. This consists of a cotton shirt, trousers, and the *chama*, the latter being a kind of cotton scarf worn like a toga during the day, and used at night for a bed-covering. The costume is the same for men and women and for all classes. The method of draping the *chama* is indicative of the attitude of the wearer towards the person in whose presence he may be. Thus, to draw it across the face would imply contempt, while to drop it off the shoulders and gather it round the waist is the highest form of respect.

Impromptu courts of law, where any passer-by may be called upon to act as a judge, are still held at every street corner, and any trivial dispute is settled with impassioned oratory and an appalling waste of time. Rough-and-ready justice, according to the Mosaic code, holds the field for more serious crimes. Until recently it was a common sight to see half a dozen men swinging in the market-place from improvised gallows or trees. Now murderers are put to death in a little hut wherein they are tied to a post; rifles are trained on them through tubes in the wall, and the triggers are pulled by the relatives of the murdered man.

The great *gebburs*, or raw-meat banquets, where as many as seventeen or eighteen thousand men—soldiers, officials, retainers, slaves—are fed in a day, are still held, and my wife and I were fortunate enough to be present at almost the last of these to which Europeans were admitted in Addis. It was a wonderful sight. Some five thousand men squatted round long tables in an immense hall, whilst huge joints of red, raw beef, each hanging from a pole borne by two men, were carried along between the rows of diners so that each man could cut off a strip of meat with his own knife, cramming as much of it as possible into his mouth and cutting off the remainder with an upward stroke—a process fraught with considerable peril to the nose!

We watched for nearly four hours, but this was only a third of the entertainment, for a similar relay had been fed before and another was to follow; and through it all the Empress sat behind green silk curtains, and the Regent amid his chiefs on the platform near us. I was told that about four hundred oxen were slaughtered for this feast and, judging from the amount of raw meat which our own servants ate when on trek with us, I can quite believe it. Our twenty-three men would finish an ox in two days!

The feeding of vast numbers of retainers at these *gebburs* is only one of many examples of the survival of feudalism in Abyssinia; one comes across them continually. For instance, every man is bound to give so many days' work a year to his overlord, whether it be in ploughing, cutting the grass, road-making, or in other ways. On one occasion, when the Empress wished to worship at a particular church some three or four miles away, it was realized a few days beforehand that there was no road leading to it. So every one, from Ras Taffari, the heir-apparent, downwards, turned out to remedy the defect. The Prince carried a stone and placed it in position. The great chiefs and officers followed suit, and soon all along the track some thousands of men were "making smooth the way," so that by the appointed date all was in order and her Majesty was able to proceed in state to her church.

Manufacturers hardly exist, even in Addis. Cotton is ginned by hand and the weaver sits at his hand-loom with his feet in a pit, as in the centuries gone by. The ploughs are of wood and merely scratch the surface of the earth. The dead are buried quite casually, in cemeteries over which traffic circulates, and at night prowling hyænas dig up the bodies. Side by side with all this, roads are now being made for newly imported automobiles; sewing-machines click in the market-place; and at the Regent's Palace one enjoys meals cooked and served in the most approved European manner.

Interesting as Addis Abbaba is, however, the unknown and unchanging country outside is far more so. Indeed, there are many parts of Abyssinia that are still

A "GEBBUR" OR RAW-MEAT BANQUET IN ABYSSINIA

The Abyssinian has an enormous appetite for raw meat, and one of the most striking sights in the country is the feast provided by a member of the aristocracy for his retainers. At one of these barbaric banquets as many as 18,000 persons, served in three relays, will devour 400 oxen.

IN THE GENERAL MARKET OF ADDIS ABBABA

The natives, although accustomed to the intense heat, carry parasols as protection against the sun. City life radiates from the markets, where the peasants, merchants, hillmen with spears, women, and men-at-arms, afoot and on donkeys, gather to barter in the open air.

A STREET COURT OF JUSTICE AT ADDIS ABBABA

Witnesses testify with dramatic gestures and voluble oratory in the impromptu street courts; a passer-by is often called upon to act as judge, and his verdict is always accepted.

unexplored and of which we know nothing. But trekking in Abyssinia is not all honey. There are no roads, only tracks. It is almost impossible to get a guide who really knows any long stretch of route other than the ordinary caravan tracks from market to market. The country is cut up by tremendous ravines and watercourses, and dotted with mountains of every shape and size. Rivers must be forded or swum; and it is impossible to rely with any certainty on obtaining supplies of any kind. Hence the traveler's caravan must be a self-contained unit.

There is no more delightful experience than trekking through the valleys and across the plateaux of Abyssinia, among people unspoilt by contact with civilization, amid gorgeous scenery and in the brilliant sunshine of a temperate altitude. They have always shown us the greatest kindness and courtesy. Last year while returning to the capital after a lengthy trip into the old Abyssinian Kingdom of Gojjam, my wife had the misfortune to break her arm and had to be carried for several days in a hammock. Passers-by continually stopped and inquired what the trouble was, and then insisted on taking their turn in helping to carry the hammock for a quarter of a mile or so—a mark of practical courtesy and sympathy which would be difficult to surpass.

It is necessary to obtain a special permit before one can travel in the interior. These permits have always afforded me a certain amount of amusement. They described the whole party in minute detail, down to the number of guns and revolvers carried. But the soldiers or officials to whom they had to be presented *en route* were quite unable to read and while some studied the permits carefully upside down, I had on one occasion to read it aloud to a chief myself.

Very few Abyssinians outside the priesthood and the officials at Addis Abbaba, by the way, are able to read or write. The people as a whole are quite illiterate, and letters are not signed but sealed. The Empress alone is entitled to place her seal at the top of her letters; every one else's appears below the writing. It is a graceful script and a picturesque language; but as

THE COURT OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Barbed wire protects the judge and jury sitting on the verandah. If a husband and wife separate, each has the right at the time of the divorce to forbid the remarriage of the other with one given person.

there are 231 letters in the alphabet, besides about 20 compounds of these, Amharic is not exactly a subject that can be mastered in a week-end.

There may be said to be three "estates of the realm"—the ruling class, the church, and the people. The ruling class consists of the Regent, the Empress, the great chiefs, governors of provinces, and ministers. Of these the most important is the Regent, a most remarkable man of about thirty-five, who, earnestly desiring the welfare and advancement of his people, works from 7 in the morning till 10 at night, in the almost hopeless task of trying to introduce administrative reform, decent government, and modern institutions, against the opposition of the vast bulk of his reactionary fellows. In this he is unfortunately not helped by the Empress, who, swayed by the upholders of the *ancien régime*, and notably the church, cannot be regarded as sharing his views.

The great chiefs are wealthy and powerful, and as any change must in their view be to their disadvantage, they are entirely reactionary, and opposed to all innovation. The governors of the provinces are, many of them, practically semi-independent; they receive no salaries, and remit to the central government a mere fraction of the taxes in cash and kind which they extract from the people under their control. Indeed, it may be said that the writ of the central government does not run far from Addis Abbaba. Of the ministers who are supposed to assist the Regent and the Empress little good can be said. There is a council of twenty-two, most of whom are politically opposed to the Regent, and recent appointments to that body indicate that merit is a bar to advancement, and that none but willing tools of one faction or another need apply.

The church is another strange mediæval survival: it is a powerful and wealthy body, owning (since the thirteenth century) about a quarter of the country, and consisting of enormous numbers of uneducated, idle, and useless persons, who do little but exist in sloth on the large revenues they draw. The head of the church, the Abuna, is a Copt appointed by the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria; and the

DRINKING AT AN OPEN AIR "BAR"

The barmaids serve the customers without rising from their seats on the ground. The average Abyssinian likes his "tot" of spirits but has never acquired the smoking habit.

death of the last incumbent last December give rise to a controversy as to whether this old practice should be followed in choosing a new Abuna or whether an Abyssinian should be appointed. As in most other things in Abyssinia, the upholders of the old custom will probably triumph.

The people are on the whole a pleasant race, and the farther they are from the capital the more pleasant they are. In different parts of the country different conditions obtain; thus for example in Gojjam the population is almost entirely Abyssinian and Christian, whereas in Aruni it is almost entirely Galla, pagan or Moslem, and the only Abyssinians are the officials and soldiers. The peasants, farmers, and *nagadiṣ* [merchants] are, on the whole, an industrious and worthy population; but the soldiers, of whom there are large numbers, are the very reverse, and a more worthless crowd it would be hard to find. There are immense numbers of slaves and *gabars* [serfs] among the conquered populations, and with this aspect of the social organization of the people I shall deal later.

As to the state of development reached by the country it is necessary to draw a sharp dividing line between Addis Abbaba and the country outside. Addis Abbaba is in a transitionary stage, and is suffering from a veneer of civilization, very lamentable from the point of view of those who knew it and liked it better years ago. The town has been invaded by about two hundred motor cars within the last two years; roads have been made on which they can run (within limits); stone houses roofed with tin have multiplied; and members of the more wealthy classes have commenced to wear boots. But much of the old remains. Sufferers from leprosy, smallpox, and other diseases parade the town and beg for alms, exhibiting revolting sores and stumps of legs and arms. There is no sanitation, and hyænas and jackals come into the town at night to help the pariah-dogs do the scavenging work. The contrasts met with at every turn between the old and the new are amongst the most interesting and instructive features of the place. Outside the capital, however, nothing has changed, and

the people live as they did a thousand years ago.

As might be imagined, the volume of trade is, for so large and potentially wealthy a country, almost negligible, amounting probably to about ten million dollars a year in all. The rich soil on which two or three crops a year can be raised, might be infinitely more widely cultivated; there are no communications other than a single line of railway from Jibuti to Addis Abbaba, and a few roads in Addis Abbaba; all trade and travel are carried on by mules, ponies, or camels, over tracks which in the rainy season are often impassable.

Another difficulty which hinders development is the currency; the only one accepted is the Maria Theresa dollar, and large stacks of these have to be bought by merchants to pay for produce, and sent on mule-back to remote districts in order to carry on trading operations. Thus every transaction involves two operations—the purchase of dollars and the purchase of produce—and if a gain is made on one, the chances are that a loss will be made on the other. The rapacity of some of the provincial governors is a further hindrance to production by the peasants, while the difficulties of dealing with many of the officials and authorities is a further bar to development by European interests.

RAS TAFFARI AND RETAINERS

The European influence on the ruler's dress is shown in this photograph. The rifle across his knees indicates his rank as defender of the Empress and guardian of the church.

A PUBLIC EXECUTION

Trials are held on the street corners, and convicted murderers were formerly hanged in the market place. This man was one of seven upon whom summary justice was visited. Since this photograph was taken the system of executing a death sentence has been changed. The convicted murderer is now confined in a small room, and relatives of his victim execute the death sentence by shooting through apertures.

I have studied the problems of the country for nearly eight years, and have trekked about it, and learned something of the language, and I have often been accused of being too sympathetic and of taking too lenient a view of the Abyssinians in my writings. But in order to understand the position of a country it is essential to understand the mentality of its people, and to appreciate, even if one does not agree with, their point of view.

One of their main characteristics is intense pride—pride in their country, its history, religion, and military successes.

AN EXAMPLE OF ABYSSINIA'S PENAL METHODS

It is evident from this picture of a gang of prisoners carrying heavy bundles of lumber through the streets of Addis Abbaba that convicts are not mollycoddled in Abyssinia.

This, to one familiar only with the attitude of a conquered Negro race, is incomprehensible, and somewhat trying. Especially is this so when to it are added dislike and intense suspicion of the foreigner and his ways. But one can hardly wonder at this when one considers the low type of so-called "European" who has preyed on the Abyssinians for years, setting him a standard of morals and life in no way better than his own, cringing to the great and bullying the small.

It is, moreover, only fair to say that the Abyssinians are almost as suspicious of each other, and that the Regent, for example, feels compelled himself to do a vast amount of detail work which ought to be left to subordinates, but which he cannot so delegate, owing to the absence of capable honest men who would follow his example and work straightforwardly *pro bono publico*.

These and other difficulties make the task of the Regent a difficult and unenviable one, and his abilities will be taxed to the uttermost in dealing with the important problems with which his country is faced. Among the more important are the development of its resources, the organization of administration on sound lines, frontier troubles, the question of Lake Tsana, Italian interests, and the League of Nations and slavery.

Space will not permit more than a very brief reference to some of these questions. It is surely time that Abyssinia undertook on an adequate scale the policing and guarding of her frontiers; the Government of Kenya is obliged to spend no less than $200,000 a year to secure the frontier population against raids for ivory, cattle, and more rarely slaves; whilst in every report of the Sudan Government reference is made to these raiding troubles somewhere along the 2,000 miles of British Territory which marches with Abyssinia.

Then certain of the powers are pressing for concessions. Great Britain wishes to harness the waters of Lake Tsana for the more efficient irrigation of her cotton fields in the Sudan and Egypt. The farmers and traders of Gojjam strongly recommend the project, as they would distinctly benefit by it. But the authorities of Addis Abbaba are suspicious and the church is against it on the theory that the waters of the Blue Nile are sacred and should not be interfered with. Italy is asking for certain railway concessions, and other powers are pressing for trading and other privileges.

Photograph by E. A. Salisbury © Ewing Galloway

ABYSSINIAN DIGNITARIES AND THEIR RETINUES

Abyssinia is divided into sub-kingdoms, each with a court patterned after the pomp, ceremony, and gold lace of the imperial court of Ras Taffari at Addis Abbaba.

Last but not least, the slavery question will have to be further dealt with. Abyssinia was admitted to the League of Nations on certain conditions in this connection which, being impossible of fulfillment, have not been fulfilled; no one knowing the country expected that they could. The problem is an extraordinarily difficult one, and in a country where the whole social system is based on domestic slavery, any idea of a wholesale freeing of slaves is, of course, sheer lunacy.

Moreover, it is quite true that domestic slaves in Abyssinia are on the whole as happy and well-treated as members of the family, and that they would probably be much worse off if freed than they are now. Experiments by individuals in freeing their personal slaves have not proved conspicuously successful. The Regent has issued decrees providing that the children of slaves are born free, and reënacting the death penalty for slave raiding and trading; he is also trying to establish a school or home for freed slaves. But this must be made effective, and such slave trading and raiding as exists, small in extent though it may be, must be completely stamped out.

The question of the *gabar* or serfdom system (which in my view is far worse than slavery as it exists in Abyssinia) also will have to be dealt with, and it is clear that the League of Nations will expect action to be taken to treat these questions more adequately. In this as in all other matters affecting progress and reform in his country, Ras Taffari is undoubtedly sincere and genuinely desirous of proceeding on right lines. Unfortunately, the majority of those wielding power and influence in Abyssinia are opposed to his ideas and, instead of helping him, do all in their power to thwart him.

To all those who, like myself, have the interest and welfare of Abyssinia at heart, it is a grievous thing that so sincere a patriot should not be supported by strong and honest men who would help him to steer his country through the difficult times that are coming, and are indeed at hand. But if the Regent, loyally supported from within and without, is able to carry out his ideas, then there seems no reason why Abyssinia should not retain her position as the last independent African empire, and give the lie to those who say that a Hamitic race, strongly diluted by Semitic blood as it is, cannot govern itself.

Drawn by Walter Tittle

GEORGE W. OLVANY

The New Leader of Tammany Hall.